



Villamanta Disability  
Rights Legal Service Inc.

Villamanta Disability Rights Legal Service Inc.

## Information Sheet Updated November 2014

# Voting

### What is an election?

An election is when people are asked to vote about who they want to make decisions. Federal, State and Local governments have elections every few years so that citizens can decide who should be in control over decisions that affect their areas of responsibility. A person who wants to be elected to represent people who live in a particular area is called a *candidate*. Candidates who believe in the same things generally belong to a political party. Candidates who don't belong to a political party stand as independents.

### Who has the right to vote in an election?

If you are 18 years of age or over, and you are an Australian citizen, you have the right to vote in Federal elections. This means you choose who you want to govern or make decisions for the whole of Australia. You also have the right to vote in state elections for whatever State you live in, and for the local government elections in your local municipality.

### What has to happen before I can exercise my right to vote?

Your name needs to be on the Electoral Roll. You can check if your name is on the Electoral Roll by ringing the Australian Electoral Commission on 13 23 26. If your name is not already on the Roll you will need to fill out an Electoral Enrolment Form. You can ask the Electoral Commission to send you one of these, or you can pick up one at the Post Office. You should also fill out a new Electoral Enrolment Form whenever you change your address.

### Is there anyone who is not entitled to vote?

- There are very few people who are not entitled to vote. These are:
- People who are under 18 years of age;
- People who don't have Australian citizenship;
- People who don't understand about how to vote or what it means.
- Prisoners who are serving a sentence of five years or more;
- People who have been convicted of treason.

Remember, everyone who is 18 years of age or over and born in Australia or an Australian citizen, has a right to:

- Vote in public elections that decide who the federal, state or local government will be;
- Receive support if they need it to exercise the right to vote.

**Important Note - This Information Sheet has been produced only for use in Victoria, Australia. Some of the laws mentioned in this Information Sheet will be different in other places.**

### **Does having an intellectual disability, a mental illness or an acquired brain injury mean that I am not eligible to vote?**

No. Most people, regardless of disability, are able to understand most things about voting. We all need someone to help explain some aspects of voting to us from time to time. But regardless of the help and support we might need, we all have our own preferences about what we want to see happening in Australia, in Victoria and in our local area. You do not have to prove your ability to understand these things - the law assumes that you have the capacity to understand.

### **What happens if my name is on the Electoral Roll and I don't vote?**

Voting is compulsory in Australia. This means that you could get fined if you do not vote at an election.

### **Where do I have to go to vote?**

Most people vote at a nearby polling booth. You can find out where your closest polling booth is by calling the Electoral Commission.

In the weeks before an election, the polling booths will be organised. If you have concerns about accessibility, you can contact the Electoral Commission and ask them which polling booths will be accessible. All polling booths have staff to assist people with disabilities.

### **What if I can't get to the polling booth?**

You can still vote. If, on the day of the election, you are away from the area where you normally live, you can vote at a polling booth close to where you are on election day. If you do this, you should tell one of the staff at the Polling Booth that you are from a different area. This will mean that you are an Absentee Voter. The staff will be able to tell you what to do so that you can vote for the candidates standing for election in the area where you normally live. Many polling booths allow people to vote before election day. If you think you will be busy on election day, you can enquire about early voting. If you are unable to get to the polling booth for other reasons, such as being unwell or unable to get out, then you will need to send in a postal vote. The Electoral Commission can help you to arrange this if you contact them before election day. The Electoral Commission also provides mobile polling booths to places like hospitals and nursing homes.

### **What happens when I get to the Polling Booth?**

Once you arrive in the Polling Booth building, there will be a staff person from the Electoral Commission who will ask your name and cross this off a list.

They will then give you a ballot paper and they will show you where to go to fill it in. When you have filled in the ballot paper you will need to put it in a ballot box. The staff will show you where the ballot boxes are.

### **What if I make a mistake when I am filling out the ballot paper?**

You should take the ballot paper back to the Polling Booth staff and ask for another ballot paper.

### **Can I have someone help me at the Polling Booth?**

Yes. You can take a friend with you, or you can ask one of the staff at the Polling Booth to help you. This can include getting help to fill out the ballot paper if that is what you need.

There is also likely to be a lot of information on television, radio and in the newspapers about what the different candidates believe in and what plans they have for the future.

### **How should I decide who to vote for?**

This has to be your own decision, and should choose whoever you think the best candidate is. In the weeks before the election, you are entitled to ring the different candidates and ask them any questions that you might think are important to help you to decide who to vote for. On the day of the election, most of the candidates will have a representative at the Polling Booth. These people will be standing near the front door and will be handing out slips of paper telling you how to fill out your ballot paper if you want to vote for that particular candidate or a particular political party. You do not have to take these slips of paper if you do not want to. You can also ask these people about the candidates that they are helping. They may be able to give you more information about their policies and ideas. But remember - these people are not official staff of the Electoral Commission. Most of them are volunteers who are working for individual candidates, rather than for the Electoral Commission.

### **Do I have to tell anyone whom / have voted for?**

No. Your vote is private. You should not write your name, or anything else that could identify you, on the ballot paper.

### **Will I get into trouble if I have filled out the ballot paper incorrectly?**

No. Your vote is anonymous and so no one can tell which people have made mistakes and which ones haven't. If you make a mistake your vote may not be counted. So it's a good idea to try not to make a mistake if you want your vote to count.

### **What if I don't want to vote for anyone?**

If you don't want to vote for anyone, you don't have to. You can leave your ballot paper empty. But remember that you still have to go to the polling booth on election day, or you might get fined.

### **Electronically Assisted Voting (EAV)**

If you have sight, literacy or English language difficulties, or a motor skill impairment, you are now eligible to vote using a telephone or touch screen. For more information about EAV, call 131 832, or visit the Victorian Electoral Commission's website at:

[www.vec.vic.gov.au/default.html](http://www.vec.vic.gov.au/default.html)